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Programme 18
Economic and social development in Western Asia

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Overall orientation

18.1 The overall orientation of the programme is to further equitable economic and social development, to promote regional cooperation and to strengthen the ability of the region to cope with the implications of globalization. The direction of the programme is provided in resolutions of the General Assembly and of the Economic and Social Council, which in its resolution 1818 (LV) of 9 August 1973 established the terms of reference of the Economic Commission for Western Asia, and in its resolution 1985/69 of 26 July 1985, amended those terms in order to underscore the social dimension of the functions of the Commission, at which time the name was altered to the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) to reflect that change. Further direction to the programme is provided in ESCWA resolutions, in particular, ESCWA resolution 220 (XX) on the adoption, by ESCWA member States, of the Beirut Declaration, dated 27 May 1999, on the occasion of the celebration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Commission. The Beirut Declaration presented a vision of the role and tasks of ESCWA for the twenty-first century and aimed at enhancing the role of the Commission at the regional level, in line with the Secretary-General's efforts to revitalize the performance of the United Nations at the dawn of the third millennium. Substantive responsibility for the programme is vested in the Commission.

18.2 The overall strategy of ESCWA is designed around five interdependent and complementary subprogrammes. The strategy is based on the formulation of regional programmes, mechanisms and solutions to interface with global issues and problems, in both the economic and social fields, to help ESCWA members to achieve a balanced integration in the world economy. One aim of the programme is to foster the adoption and adaptation of global principles, standards and trends, without detriment to the interests and specificities of the region. Another aim is to advocate the creation of an enabling environment that would stimulate the achievement of sustainable development with its three interdependent and mutually reinforcing components: economic development, social development and protection of the environment. Within this framework, the issue of gender commands special attention. Structurally, a gender perspective is articulated in each of the five ESCWA subprogrammes as a principal multidisciplinary component thereof. Likewise, it is an integral substantive component of the right to development which permeates the work of ESCWA and is one of the cornerstones of its mandate: the promotion of integrated economic and social development.

18.3 The implementation of the overall strategy would involve the following:

(a) Facilitating the formulation of new region-specific strategies for development based on reducing the heavy reliance on oil revenues through the diversification of output, mobilization of regional savings and attraction of suitable foreign direct investment, by continuing its work as a regional catalyst and an effective forum for dialogue, for the exchange of experiences and for building consensus and common positions;

(b) Cultivating the interest of member States in the advantages of regional cooperation and coordination in developing concerted policies, norms, regulations and legislation on regional issues, such as water scarcity, renewable energy resources, environment protection, intraregional trade, future negotiations under the auspices of the World Trade Organization (WTO), technology transfer and information networks;

(c) Raising the awareness of ESCWA members of their rights and obligations under multilateral trade liberalization in goods and services and partnership agreements as well as of the vital importance of regional and subregional integration to the future of the region;

(d) Assisting member States in determining regional priorities, developing effective regional coordination mechanisms and strengthening existing ones, and streamlining activities of common interest, while strengthening cooperation with other regional and subregional organizations, by serving as a platform, focal point and coordinator for United Nations organizations with a regional mandate;

(e) Incorporating, into the substantive areas of the programme, multidisciplinary issues, especially gender, human and institutional capacity-building, the right to development, poverty eradication, the environment, technology transfer and the development and dissemination of data and information;

(f) Enhancing the role of ESCWA as a major source for up-to-date reliable statistical data,

information systems and networks in the economic and social fields of the region, while working to enhance demand, especially by the business sector, by raising awareness of the increasing importance of information as the most powerful tool of analysis for promoting business;

(g) Providing continued support to the least developed member country (Yemen) and other countries with special needs.

18.4 In fulfilling its mandates, ESCWA has maintained, and shall continue maintaining, cooperative arrangements with member States and with a host of United Nations and non-United Nations regional organizations, notably the League of Arab States (LAS), the Arab Gulf Programme for United Nations Development Organizations (AGFUND), the other regional commissions, the United Nations Development Group, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and the Bretton Woods institutions.

Subprogramme 1
Management of water, energy and the environment for sustainable development

Objective

18.5 The objective of this subprogramme is to achieve better management of water, energy and the environment and, through integrated approaches, positively impact sustainable development in the region.

Strategy

18.6 Within ESCWA, the substantive responsibility for this subprogramme is vested in the Energy, Natural Resources and Environment Division. The strategy will be oriented towards increasing the contribution of water and energy resources to the sustainable development of the region through integrated approaches. The ESCWA region is marked by a scarcity of water resources and the existence of substantial, but unequally distributed, fossil energy reserves. Accordingly, activities will target the promotion of policies, measures and technologies that will contribute to achieving sustainable development in the region. Particular emphasis will be placed on the rationalization of the use of resources, the development of conventional and non-conventional water resources, management of integrated water resources, promotion of new and renewable energy applications, and pollution control and environmental protection. Efforts will also be made to build capacity and increase public awareness of decision makers and users to the need for the rational use of energy and water resources and the protection of the environment. Member States will be provided with advice on ways and means of incorporating the right to development in the management of water, energy and environmental protection. In particular, support will be provided to decision makers in their efforts to integrate into their policies and plans the social aspects of the management of water, energy and the environment. Ways and means of increasing the access of the poor, especially poor women, to cheap energy and water, especially clean water, will be identified, and options that would facilitate the creation of new jobs and generate income, particularly for poor women, will be pursued.

18.7 Member countries will be assisted in addressing the consequences of economic reform policies and institutional changes in the energy and water sectors and the environment, by assessing and analysing the status thereof, especially with regard to privatization. Activities will facilitate the establishment and coordination of monitoring and reporting mechanisms on environmental issues and promote the implementation of the relevant chapters of Agenda 21, with special emphasis on energy and water by supporting Governments in their efforts to integrate environmental considerations into their development policies. Innovative approaches in environmental management and pollution control will be promoted, and measures and technologies will be identified to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases. Concerted policies and regional coordination mechanisms will also be promoted, particularly for new and renewable sources of energy, as will the rational use of resources. The promotion of subregional and regional electricity and gas networks will be supported through intraregional cooperation in the fields of water, energy and the environment.

Expected accomplishments

18.8 Expected accomplishments would include: (a) the adoption of cost-effective, environment-friendly policy

measures and technologies and economic instruments identified to ensure sustainability of water and energy resources on both the supply and demand side; (b) increased awareness and application in countries of the region of internationally recognized standards in environmental management and pollution control; and (c) increased access of rural areas to clean water and energy supplies.

Indicators of achievement

18.9 Indicators of achievement would include (a) the number of countries using environmentally friendly technologies to augment water resources and produce alternative sources of energy; (b) the number of options and technologies identified to reduce greenhouse gases; and (c) the number of member States adopting environmental management measures to safeguard the environment and decrease pollution.

Subprogramme 2
Promoting social change for sustainable development

Objective

18.10 The objective is to achieve social change that is region-specific and culturally sensitive in the direction of social equity, through sustainable human development and gender equity and equality within an enabling environment, while advocating good governance and human rights.

Strategy

18.11 Within ESCWA, substantive responsibility for this subprogramme is vested in the Social Development Issues and Policies Division. The subprogramme will be implemented through an integrated, holistic and rights-based approach to social development. This will enable ESCWA to serve as an early-warning system for the social sector, and as a forum for partners and actors, including non-governmental organizations in the development process. ESCWA members have to grapple with acute social problems. These result from disproportionate income distribution, abject poverty, unbalanced provision of basic social services, illiteracy, health deficiencies, urbanization and population movements, especially of refugees and the displaced, and the limited improvement in the status of women and their participation in the development process. All these problems are threats to community cohesion and to family structure and values. They are compounded by political instability, waste and mismanagement of resources, corruption and lack of transparency, which have been diverting the scarce financial resources away from legitimate expenditures, including investment in social development. The situation at the regional level would be aggravated by the social and cultural impact of globalization on society including the uneven distribution of the benefits of trade liberalization; the rapid pace of technological change; and the information revolution. Such a regional situation will accelerate the pace of social change and add to the complexity of social issues, requiring innovative approaches to address them.

18.12 Activities of the subprogramme include providing advice to member States in establishing broad-based policy linkages, grounded in human rights, between population, resources, environment and development. Efforts will be made to promote closer ties between governmental organizations and all actors of civil society. Integrated regional responses to global conferences' agendas will also be promoted by assisting member States in institution- and capacity-building of national and regional machinery. Member States will also be assisted in formulating strategies for sustainable human development. Particular attention will be paid to poverty alleviation and productive employment, including the family as a basic unit for social cohesion, while also emphasizing good governance and human rights as means of promoting sustainable human development. Support will be provided to ESCWA member States and local authorities in formulating appropriate innovative and integrated policies and programmes to foster sustainable settlements, particularly in cities and other urban areas. Activities will also focus on increasing gender awareness at large and on building capacities for the empowerment of women and their advancement by advocating a rights-based approach to gender equity and equality in the region and mainstreaming a gender perspective into policies, plans and programmes.

Expected accomplishments

18.13 Expected accomplishments would include: (a) increased awareness of the importance of underscoring social policies as an integral part of social development; (b) establishment of networking

mechanisms for social development among partners and actors in the development process, especially with institutions of civil society; (c) use by countries and other national machinery of social indicators and new information technology to monitor progress made in the implementation of the recommendations of global conferences; and (d) improved usage of gender statistics as a tool for analysis and formulation of gender-sensitive social policies.

Indicators of achievement

18.14 Indicators of achievement would include: (a) the number of countries producing national reports and officially adopting social policies; (b) the number of joint reports, committees and projects between governments and institutions of civil society; (c) the number of countries and institutions using social indicators in monitoring human development; and (d) the number of countries and institutions incorporating a gender perspective into policies, plans and statistics.

Subprogramme 3
Economic development and regional cooperation during the evolution of a globalized world economy

Objective

18.15 The objective is to sustain economic development in the region, while achieving a balanced integration in the world economy.

Strategy

18.16 Within ESCWA, the substantive responsibility for this subprogramme is vested in the Economic Development Issues and Policies Division. Implementation of the subprogramme will require the formulation of appropriate economic policies and development strategies in response to the new challenges and opportunities created by the rapidly evolving globalization phenomenon and the increasing trend towards establishing regional trade blocs. These policies should also take into consideration the need for good governance while enhancing the role of the private sector, and the emergence of issues with an international mandate, such as poverty eradication, gender mainstreaming, protection of the environment, and the emphasis on the human face of development by securing the right to development. The capacity of ESCWA member countries to meet these challenges and opportunities will be enhanced by increasing awareness and understanding of the rights and obligations arising from accession to WTO, joining regional and subregional blocs, taking part in partnership agreements, and the liberalization of financial markets.

18.17 In-depth reviews, assessments and analyses of the economic situation in the region will be provided with a view to enhancing macroeconomic management. Special emphasis will be placed on international and intraregional trade, financial markets, public finance and foreign direct investment through joint ventures with transnational corporations. Member States will be supported in identifying and formulating alternative development strategies based on diversifying and mobilizing national resources to offset fluctuations in oil revenues, facilitating foreign direct investment, the flow of intraregional investment and the return of capital that has been invested outside the region. Activities will also focus on defining the role of the governments, the private sector and civil society in economic activities and responsibility for development. Capacity-building in decision-making at all levels will be encouraged in the light of evolving development strategies. The awareness of member States will be increased with regard to the significance of promoting the human aspects of economic development by highlighting its impact on reducing social injustice and by supporting the right to development, gender mainstreaming and poverty eradication.

Expected accomplishments

18.18 Expected accomplishments would include: (a) enhanced ability of member countries to monitor targets for achieving sustainable economic development; (b) increased efficiency and stability in macroeconomic management; (c) increased awareness, among member States, of the challenges to their economy and opportunities created by the new international trading system and existing and potential regional blocs; and (d) an enhanced and effective contribution of the private sector to economic activity.

Indicators of achievement

18.19 Indicators of achievement would include: (a) the availability of timely economic statistics, and analysis for policy makers; (b) the number of countries

adopting measures to increase the efficiency and stability of macroeconomic management; (c) the extent of assistance provided to member countries to understand the implications of the new international trading system and the formation of regional economic groupings for their economy and increased number of countries acceding thereto; and (d) the rate of contribution of the private sector to the GDP, employment, fixed capital formation and trade.

Subprogramme 4
Coordination of sectoral policies and harmonization of norms and standards for sustainable development within global changes

Objective

18.20 The objective is to positively impact sustainable development through the coordination of sectoral policies and the harmonization of sectoral norms and standards within the region to achieve compatibility with international requirements, thus enhancing competitiveness of goods and services.

Strategy

18.21 In the ESCWA region, the persistence of fluctuations in the oil market makes the development of the non-oil sectors the only way of achieving diversification in output and of creating new sources of income. In addition, accession to WTO, as well as integration into regional and subregional blocs and participation in partnership agreements, require that competitiveness in output be achieved through the implementation of advanced technology, the modernization of production support services, especially in the transport and telecommunication sectors, and adherence to internationally recognized standards and regulations. These are prerequisites to benefiting from the opportunities of a free-trading system. The obligation to comply with international mandates on some emerging issues requires further commitment to incorporating the right to development, poverty eradication, gender mainstreaming and protection of the environment into the planning and implementation of sectoral policies.

18.22 Support will be provided to member States in the formulation of coordinated sectoral policies and harmonization of norms, standards and regulations to create agricultural and manufacturing industries that are export-oriented and are compatible with the requirements of a free-trading system. Measures will be identified, including technological innovations, to facilitate capacity development in order to enhance productivity, competitiveness and environmental compatibility of output. Member States will be advised on the facilitation of national, intraregional and interregional transport and telecommunications operations to support the physical flow of goods and movement of people as well as on the integration of markets at the national and regional levels. The awareness of both the governments and the private sector would be increased with regard to the need for rational utilization of scarce resources, especially land and water in sectoral production and investment activities. Additionally, awareness among ESCWA member States would be increased with regard to the importance of addressing the social aspect of sectoral development. This would be achieved by identifying production, transport and telecommunication activities that benefit the least advantaged groups of society, especially women, and helping to bridge the gap between rural and urban areas.

Expected accomplishments

18.23 Expected accomplishments would include: (a) increased facilitation of physical and information transboundary flows among member States; (b) enhanced competitiveness through increased capacity-building in relevant productive sectors; (c) enhanced sectoral productivity through increased usage by member States of environment-friendly measures, and improved linkages between technology and sectoral development; and (d) integration between rural and urban areas taking into consideration necessary interaction between the agricultural sector and other sectors.

Indicators of achievement

18.24 Indicators of achievement would include: (a) the number of member States adopting improved quality regimes and building networks and infrastructure; (b) fewer technical barriers across borders; (c) an increased number of member States adopting appropriate legal instruments to ensure competitiveness; (d) the number of institutions achieving ISO 9000 and 14000 standards and other

international standards and the extent of assistance provided in building the requisite technological skills; (e) the extent of identification and usage, by member States, of environment-friendly options in sectoral development and increased usage of technology to promote sectoral development; and (f) the number of countries adopting policies for ensuring sustainable livelihoods in rural areas.

Subprogramme 5
Development, coordination and harmonization of statistics

Objective

18.25 The objective of this subprogramme is to coordinate the development of statistics in order to effectively meet planning, policy-making and administrative requirements for addressing emerging national economic and social priorities.

Strategy

18.26 Within ESCWA, the substantive responsibility for this subprogramme is vested in the Statistics Division. The strategy will be implemented in coordination with international organizations and in cooperation with national and regional institutions. It would contribute to the development of national and regional statistics in the ESCWA region with a view to producing and disseminating the reliable, timely, standardized, gender-sensitive and comparable statistics needed by planners, policy makers, public and private enterprises, researchers and regional and international organizations. While the development of statistics in ESCWA member States gained momentum at the end of the twentieth century, the ability of member States to effectively meet planning, policy-making and administrative requirements in the twenty-first century will still fall short of desired results. Activities will provide a response to the mounting demand for social statistics and indicators generated by the recommendations of a number of United Nations global conferences in the field of social development. Accordingly, a better balance will be established through the provision of both economic and social statistics.

18.27 Activities of the subprogramme will strengthen the role of ESCWA as a neutral source of reliable statistics and information on the region by upgrading the collection, compilation, processing and dissemination of data using the latest information technologies. Additionally, the demand for statistics will be simultaneously increased through the enhancement of the capacity of end-users, especially the business sector, to make proper utilization of statistical data and information. Contributions will be made to statistical capacity-building in member States by assisting them in upgrading the statistical capabilities of their national cadres and by improving and expanding their statistical infrastructures in accordance with international criteria, concepts and methodologies, thereby enabling the implementation of international programmes and recommendations.

18.28 Member States will be assisted in adopting and using economic statistics and measuring indicators needed for monitoring development policies as well as for the implementation of corrective measures and the adjustment of economic policies. A core of social statistics and measure indicators will be developed for adoption by ESCWA members to monitor various aspects of the quality of life, such as employment/unemployment, poverty, gender and other issues. Activities will promote cooperation and the exchange of information, views and experiences among national statistical agencies in the region with a view to enhancing regional harmonization and integration, and improving the regional role in the international arena in the area of statistics.

Expected accomplishments

18.29 Expected accomplishments would include: (a) improved national capacity in using statistical tools for data analysis, guided by international standards; (b) increased production and use by member States of economic and social indicators needed for monitoring development policies, especially economic adjustment policies and human development; (c) further development and increased usage of a core of social statistics and indicators to monitor progress as part of follow-up to the recommendations of global conferences; and (d) improved capacity-building for the expanded production and usage of statistics on new areas, such as gender, energy and the environment and application thereof by member countries and institutions concerned.

Indicators of achievement

18.30 Indicators of achievement would include: (a) the number of countries covered and the number of personnel trained in the use of international statistical standards; (b) the number of new areas covered; (c) the number of statistical reports produced on the basis of international standards; (d) the number of joint reports, committees, meetings and projects between governments and civil society institutions; (e) the extent of application, by member States and institutions, of a core of social statistics in their statistical reports on follow-up to the recommendations of global conferences; and (f) the degree of inclusion of new statistical areas in statistical reports produced by member countries.

Legislative mandates

Programme 18

General Assembly resolutions

49/103	Food and agricultural development (subprogrammes 1 and 4)
51/176	Implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (subprogrammes 2 and 5)
52/100	Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and implementation of the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action (all subprogrammes)
52/194	Role of microcredit in the eradication of poverty (subprogrammes 2 and 4)
52/195	Women in development (subprogrammes 2 and 4)
52/196	Developing human resources for development (subprogrammes 2, 3 and 4)
53/155	Right to development (subprogrammes 2 and 3)
53/198	Implementation of the first United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (subprogrammes 2, 3 and 4)

Economic and Social Council resolution

1996/46	Regional cooperation in the economic, social and related fields (subprogrammes 2 and 3)

Economic and Social Council agreed conclusion

1997/2	Mainstreaming the gender perspective into all policies and programmes in the United Nations system (all subprogrammes)

Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia resolution

220 (XX)	Adoption of the Beirut Declaration (all subprogrammes)

Subprogramme 1
Management of water, energy and the environment for sustainable development

General Assembly resolutions

47/194	Capacity-building for Agenda 21
49/111	Report of the Commission on Sustainable Development on its second session
50/126	Water supply and sanitation

Economic and Social Council resolutions

1991/85	Water resources development and progress in the implementation of the Mar del Plata Action Plan
1991/86	Development and efficient use of energy resources

Subprogramme 2
Promoting social change for sustainable development

General Assembly resolutions

51/177	Implementation of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II)
52/25	Implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development
53/120	Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and full implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action
53/146	Human rights and extreme poverty

Economic and Social Council resolutions

1997/17	Agreed conclusions of the Commission on the Status of Women on the critical areas of concern identified in the Beijing Platform for Action
1998/43	Mainstreaming the gender perspective into all policies and programmes in the United Nations system
1998/44	Integrated and coordinated implementation and follow-up of major United Nations conferences and summits

Subprogramme 3
Economic development and regional cooperation during the evolution of a globalized world economy

General Assembly resolutions

48/180	Entrepreneurship and privatization for economic growth and sustainable development
49/97	Strengthening international organizations in the area of multilateral trade
49/101	United Nations International Symposium on Trade Efficiency
50/91	Global financial integration: challenges and opportunities
52/180	Global financial flows and their impact on the developing countries
52/186	Renewal of the dialogue on strengthening international economic cooperation for development through partnership
52/196	Developing human resources for development
52/205	Economic and technical cooperation among developing countries

53/155	Right to development
53/169	Role of the United Nations in promoting development in the context of globalization and interdependence
53/170	International trade and development
53/175	Enhancing international cooperation towards a durable solution to the external debt problem of developing countries

Subprogramme 4
Coordination of sectoral policies and harmonization of norms and standards for sustainable development within global changes

General Assembly resolutions

51/172	Communication for development programmes in the United Nations system
52/184	Science and technology for development
53/177	Industrial development cooperation

Subprogramme 5
Development, coordination and harmonization of statistics

Economic and Social Council resolution

1993/5	1993 System of National Accounts